

SERMON FOR JANUARY 10, 2021

TEXT: 1 PETER 1:3-9, 22-25

THEME: BORN AGAIN

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,, **4** to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, **5** who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. **6** In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, **7** so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. **8** Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, **9** obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. **22** Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, **23** since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; **24** for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, **25** but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

In the name of Jesus:

In 2005, ESPN's Stephen A. Smith sat down for a long, candid interview with Allen Iverson, a professional basketball player. The interview featured a comment that in hindsight predicted the world that we find ourselves living in today. In the interview, he was asked what advice that he would give to the up and coming stars, LeBron James and Carmelo Anthony. At the end of the

interview he said: “They love you right now, but please believe me—the first incident, the first time something happens, they’re waiting, man. They’re waiting.”

Celebrities and star athletes can relate to what he was saying, for the stars of today, while having a great deal of fame and wealth, also understand that your life is under the microscope. Mistakes are magnified in the media and some people will always define you by the things you do wrong.

Now, however, this is happening to ordinary people. Sadly, it is the world that we live in now. If you speak with anyone who has had a small public voice, they will tell you that “they are waiting” is the constant background in their lives. A letter to the editor will result in receiving hostile letters from those who disagree with you in return. Put something on social media, and just wait for the negative, vile responses. Every bad tweet, every bad take, every bad thought is preserved, catalogued, and spit back at you, continually, with a vengeance. (Adapted from an article by David French). Your mistake, your sin will be used by others in an attempt to define you. Your worst moments are magnified. You become known for what you have done wrong.

Where is the second chance? It is non-existent in the secular world. The sin you commit is like a stigma that is attached to you that you can’t remove.

Many call this the cancel culture. Many are just waiting to cancel you, to negate you, to ostracize you so that you are marginalized, minimalized, and taught such a lesson where you don't get a do over. This, sadly, is the world we are living in.

The people Peter was writing to knew what it was like to be marginalized and minimized. They were poor people, immigrants, the outcasts of society. But Peter had good news for them. They were not defined by their social status, by their wealth, or by their mistakes. God was a God of second chances. They had hope because they were BORN AGAIN.

Today you hear the term born again Christian used by some in an exclusionary manner. They talk about being born again in terms of having some type of religious experience and as a result of this experience, they are then considered superior to Christians who have not had such an experience as they have had. Hence, they make the judgement that there are some who call themselves Christian who are not truly born again. The fact of the matter is, if you are a Christian, you are born again, and if you are not a Christian, you are not born again and are in need of being born again.

To be born again means that you have had a spiritual rebirth. And as a follower of Christ, you have! This is what Peter is saying when he writes: According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living

hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.”

You have been born again, and you have a living hope in Jesus. God doesn't cancel He saves. He makes all things new. He who is dead is now alive in Christ, you have been born again in Baptism and by the Word to live for Jesus. You have been born again so that Jesus now lives in and through you. What you need, what I need, what the world needs, is Jesus.

Sadly many Americans today have an individualistic faith in Jesus, a faith which asks the question: “What's in it for me?” They believe in Jesus only if it is convenient or if it suits them. If they perceive things are going their way, they believe in Jesus. Others will only believe when they need Jesus, to heal their sick loved one, to answer their prayer, and when the prayer is answered and granted the way that they would like, they forget about Jesus and go on their merry way, just as in the story of the ten lepers who were cleansed of their leprosy. All ten were cleansed but only one returned to give thanks. Similarly, many turn to Jesus because they want something from Jesus, but they don't want to fully commit to following Him.

For the Christians to whom Peter is writing, they knew nothing about a “what's in it for me” faith. For these Christians, their faith was a way of life.

They trusted in Jesus to save them. Salvation wasn't just eternal salvation, it was temporal as well. Yes they believed that their sins were forgiven and they had eternal life, but they also looked to Jesus for help in whatever bad situation they found themselves in. These early Christians were willing to stake their lives on Jesus. They loved Jesus so much that they would be willing to die for Him. And some did, becoming martyrs of the faith. They just didn't have a head knowledge about Jesus, they possessed a personal faith given by the Church and witnessed by their life in the Church. They had a deep seated love for Jesus.

What was true for these Christians is true for you and me today. God has made us His special people in Jesus Christ. But how does it show? We are living in changing times, some have called it the passing of the Christian America. Going to church is not normal in today's society, as compared to earlier generations of Americans who went to church regularly. The Bible used to be respected by many, today an increasing number of people don't believe in the Bible. Many grieve over what has been lost in church life.

Whatsmore, we are living in a divided time, in that every group that isn't your own is seen as a threat. Mob mentality is becoming more and more prevalent. History is littered with horrific examples of mob mentality that

resulted in great evils justified by so-called truths propagated in the name of group unity or group survival.

But as I said last week, these are not bad times, they are different times. We are living in a new time. And to this time we have been called as a congregation and as a Church. You have been born again by the Spirit who makes you holy in God's sight. You are forgiven. You are loved. By God. And your life has been changed with Good News and empowered by Good News.

God has prepared you for this time. Just listen to what Peter says: "It was revealed to the prophets that they were serving not themselves but you! (v 12) you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God (v23), and this word is the Good News that was preached to you(v 25)."

God has brought you to this time, this place in your life and in the lives of others, to bring them hope and help in Jesus. You do that by focusing your life on Jesus and by sharing with others what Jesus has done for you. Time and again in the Gospels people lives were changed because a follower of Jesus shared what Jesus had done for them. John the Baptist told his disciples to follow Jesus and they did! Jesus goes to Galilee and finds Phillip. Jesus says to him, "Follow me." Phillip finds Nathaniel and invites him to come and see who this Jesus is and what He is all about. And Nathaniel follows Jesus. Jesus

goes throughout the countryside to heal the sick, and the people who were touched by Jesus begin to speak freely about what had happened, and they began to spread the news so much so that people were coming to Jesus from every place (Mark 1).

When you tell others what Jesus has done for you, it is a powerful way that God will use to bring hope to a people who desperately want to know that they are not defined by their mistakes, but that they are forgiven by Jesus and have another chance. That is what people who love Jesus do, they tell others their own stories about what Jesus has done for them, and God uses these stories to bring people to Christ.

Dear brother and sister in Christ, you have been born again to a living hope in Jesus. In these changing times one thing is certain, that Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. And what the world needs now is the hope that Jesus gives.

We pray: Almighty God, grant to Your Church your Holy Spirit and the wisdom that comes down from above, that Your Word may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people. That in steadfast faith we may serve you and in the confession of your name abide unto the end. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.